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# CHINESE EXCLUSION IN AUSTRALIA.

BY HUGH H. LUSK.

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THE first legislation of the first Parliament of the Australian Commonwealth has taken the form of two statutes intended to secure what is called "A White Australia." To people unacquainted with the circumstances and politics of the new Anglo-Saxon Federation the name may need some explanation, and it may even be a matter of surprise that such a subject should have been the first to occupy the attention of the Legislature. But at the election of the first Commonwealth Parliament no question, unless it might be that of the fiscal policy of the Federation, was more hotly debated, and on none at all was there so strong a feeling displayed. To understand this, it is necessary to appreciate fully the position of Australia as a country, and something at any rate of the political conditions of its people.

In some respects, the circumstances of Australia to-day greatly resemble those of America at the beginning of the last century. In both countries we have the spectacle of a very small population, settled along the sea-coast on one side of a country so vast in area as to seem ridiculously out of proportion to the number of its inhabitants. In both cases the wealth of the country is enormous, but its extent wholly unascertained, and perhaps on that very account all the more likely to prove attractive to adventurous spirits from older and more thickly peopled countries. So far, Australia to-day might seem almost a repetition of America at the opening of the century just completed. At this point, however, the parallel ceases in some most important respects. A century ago America opened her arms wide to welcome all comers to assist in the task of colonizing her unexplored territories, and developing the as yet hardly dreamed of resources of the country; Australia feels that she cannot follow this ex-

ample with any prospect of the same success. The reason lies principally in the different geographical positions of the two countries, but to some extent also in changes which a century of development has brought forth.

Europe, and especially the British isles, was the natural feeder of the population of America a century ago. There was little cause for apprehension as to the class of immigrants likely to be attracted; in Australia to-day the case is entirely different. Not Europe but Asia is the densely peopled continent which may be said to adjoin Australia, and it is a continent which experience has already shown to have no emigrating classes likely to prove a permanent benefit to the country in which they might settle. India, China, Japan, these are Australia's nearest neighbors among nations possessed of surplus population; and it is not surprising that the English-speaking people who possess and propose to develop the continent of the South Pacific are unwilling to accept them as partners in the undertaking. Both China and Japan have already shown themselves something more than willing to offer themselves for the work. For the last twenty-five years there has been a steady stream of immigration from China to the settled districts of all the colonies now united in the Commonwealth, which various legislative expedients have served only very partially to check. The influx of Japanese has been much more recent, and up to this time no attempt has been made to control it, though it has been looked on with uneasiness during the last three or four years. In the case of India, there has been no spontaneous emigration to Australia, but for some years there has been a legalized traffic in contract labor between the Madras Presidency of British India and the colony of Queensland, and several thousand laborers have been introduced every year.

Thus the settled districts of Australia have been exposed, for a good many years past, to what has seemed to the settlers of European races a serious danger of deterioration, owing to the introduction of Asiatic races, with wholly different ideas and traditions from their own, and accustomed to entirely different standards of living. This danger has been increased by the fact that the unsettled part of Australia was that which lay nearest and was by far the most accessible to Asiatic intruders, a circumstance which has been brought home to them because the gold

fields along the northern coasts have been largely, indeed mainly, occupied by Chinese. The situation in Australia, accordingly, has been, in effect, very similar to what it would have been in America fifty years ago or more, had the surplus millions of China and Japan been possessed by the spirit of enterprise which has seized them of late, and had there been no overland route available when the gold discoveries were made in California. The risk of a wave of Asiatic colonization sweeping over America's western coasts would in such a state of things have been greatly increased. This is the danger which has been apprehended in Australia of late.

Two difficulties have confronted the Parliament of the Australian Commonwealth in dealing with the question of Asiatic exclusion, and the legislation introduced has been directed to dealing separately with Asiatic peoples. There was, first, the general question of warding off the wholesale introduction of immigrants likely to lower the standard of the future population of Australia; and, next, the putting an end to the traffic in labor by the settlers in Queensland which was calculated to have a similar result in a form even more objectionable. It may be said with regard to the first question that there was nothing that could be called a difference of opinion throughout the country. There are already a good many Chinese in every one of the states of the Commonwealth, forming a percentage of the population at least five times as great as it does in America, and they are popular in none. That they are hard-working, frugal and, on the whole, fairly inoffensive and law-abiding people, is admitted everywhere; but they are essentially a people apart, incapable of really adopting, or adapting themselves to, the standards of the white race which holds the continent, and the feeling may be said to be universal which demands their exclusion. The Japanese are more popular in Australia than the Chinese, but the same objections are felt to apply to them; and it is even probable that they owe any advantage they have in popular estimation rather to their smaller numbers than to anything else.

The question which had to be met, therefore, in dealing with the proposed exclusion of the Mongolian races from Australia, was not the propriety of their exclusion, but the method of giving effect to it. The re-enactment of a Chinese exclusion act in America is a simple thing. There is, of course, the question of

Chinese or Japanese sensibility to be considered; but if the public sentiment is in favor of risking any loss of popularity at Peking or Tokio which may be involved, there is an end of the matter. China may feel that America is, after all, not so very much more sympathetic than other foreign devils, and Japan may feel offended to think that even now her people are regarded as less desirable than certain European peoples whose arrival in Japan would hardly be esteemed a benefit. Yet, if Congress thinks fit to exclude them, little will be said on the subject. The position of Australia is different. It is one of the inevitable drawbacks of incorporation in an Empire so extended as that of Great Britain that questions of primarily local concern in one of its divisions cannot be dealt with independently of the interests of the other divisions. The Commonwealth of Australia has been accorded the fullest possible powers of self-government; yet, when its Parliament proceeded to legislate for the effectual exclusion of undesirable emigration a difficulty presented itself.

The desire of the people and Parliament was to put a stop to the introduction of Chinese or Japanese immigrants by a statute that should say so in plain and unmistakable language. Other methods had been tried by the separate colonies already, such as the imposition of special poll-taxes, and the requirement of capital in the hands of the immigrants; but all had been cleverly evaded. When the promised bill was brought before Parliament by the Government, however, it was found that it contained no mention of either of the countries intended to be specially affected by its provisions. Instead of this, it took the form of an act which applied, or at any rate might in the discretion of the Executive be made to apply, to immigrants from Germany, France, Italy or America, as well as from China and Japan. A very simple educational test is, in fact, the only safeguard provided. It is required that every immigrant shall be compelled to make a written application for admission in one of certain European languages, or in English, before the proper official.

To the natural criticism, which was offered in no uncertain way by the Opposition, that it could certainly be evaded with ease by any smart Chinese or Japanese immigrant, the reply was that, in the interests of the trade of the Empire—which means, of course, of Great Britain—it was considered most unwise to antagonize either China or Japan at present. It was admitted by the Com-

monwealth Government that this was, in fact, the result of consultation with the Imperial Cabinet, and that if it were ignored by the Federal Parliament the assent of the Crown—which is required for every statute calculated to affect in any way the external relations of the Empire—might, and probably would, be withheld from it. Not a few opinions, both in and out of Parliament, were in favor of passing an act really calculated to give effect to the mind of the country, and, in case it should be disallowed, passing it again until the British Ministry should give way. It is even probable that nothing short of the appeal made by the Cabinet against taking any step to embarrass the Imperial Government at a time of exceptional difficulty would have induced the majority to accept the measure as proposed.

The Government, however, profess to be confident that the statute will answer every practical purpose of exclusion. They maintain that the demand of a written application in one or other of four or five European languages will prove as effectual a barrier to the Mongolian as heart could wish, and there is little doubt it could be made so. On the other hand, there are many objections to a system which relies for its success on what may well require a strained interpretation of the law; and it may even be doubted whether in the end the outrage to national sentiment involved may not prove quite as great as the more straightforward course approved by the public opinion of Australia. One thing, moreover, is certain: if the statute is to remain it must justify itself by proving effectual.

It is recognized that Australia has at present very little interest in any mere educational test for immigrants. It is certain, indeed, that the experience of a single month of the European arrivals at the port of New York, if it could be transferred to Sydney or Melbourne, would create an overwhelming sentiment in its favor; but of this there is at present no chance whatever. While America is open to receive the ignorant classes of Europe with little or no restraint upon their admission, these classes will certainly come here. As long as the standard of affluence which entitles the Italian, Russian or Czech immigrant to escape the charge of pauperism is so modest that it is less than the difference between the passage rates to this country and Australia, so long the number of very poor and illiterate Europeans seeking admission to any part of Australasia will be trifling

indeed. The statute just passed is, therefore, a pretence so far as the purposes which on its face it appears to be designed to effect are concerned, and like all such pretences it is only too likely to result in failure, and to lead to trouble.

There is, however, a second, and in some respects even a more important, respect in which the ideal of "a white Australia" is in danger. Fully one-third of Australia is situated within the tropics, and another third of it may be said to be sub-tropical in its climate. The problem how white labor is to be utilized for agriculture under such conditions is one which cannot be answered from experience. This problem has not been pressing in any part of Australia except the colony of Queensland. Tropical Australia is as yet practically unoccupied, much of it indeed unexplored, in the great states of West and South Australia, and for years to come this is likely to be the case, owing to the comparative smallness of the rainfall in those districts of the continent. In Queensland the position is entirely different. Possessed of a larger proportion of tropical country than any of the other states, it has also the most fertile land, and, at any rate in its eastern districts, a heavier rainfall than any other part of Australia. It is now nearly a generation since the settlers began to pursue the special lines of agriculture for which the soil and climate appeared suitable, and from the first they have done so by the use of what may be called servile labor. The natives of Australia itself were never available as laborers. But a traffic was set up in what was called Kanaka labor, for the supply of the sugar, cotton and other tropical and sub-tropical industries that were established. This traffic was, and still is, recognized by law, and was carried on subject to regulation and official oversight by the government of the colony. The Kanakas were the natives of all or any of the island groups that lie scattered widely over the South Pacific within the tropics, but particularly those lying within easy reach of the eastern coast of Australia; and only within the last six or seven years has it been necessary to go farther afield.

When these sources failed, steps were taken to supply the tropical labor market by a system of contracts under which the Government of India was prepared to sanction the deportation of natives of southern India to Queensland as laborers for definite periods, subject to a Government guarantee for their good treatment and return at the end of their term of contract. This sys-

tem has certainly served to supply the tropical labor market of Queensland with whatever number of hands might be required.

It is probably needless to enter at length upon the objections to its continuance, as most of these lie on the surface. It is not necessary to suppose that what may be termed serious abuses of the system exist, to understand that it is viewed with intense suspicion and dislike by the settlers in every one of the other states of the new Commonwealth. That there have been some abuses is undeniable, indeed, but not more, probably, than are inseparable from any such system of servile labor. The feeling in every part of Australia outside the borders of Queensland has been in favor of its complete abolition, and even in Queensland there is a division of opinion. There, as elsewhere in Australia, the influence of organized labor is powerful, and indeed it was this alone that secured a majority vote in favor of joining the Federation. Yet the obstacles in the way of its speedy and complete abolition have been found to be very considerable. The fact that it had been established and fully recognized by law for many years, and that large and important industries have grown up dependent upon it, gives it on a small scale a curious resemblance to the old slavery problem of this country. It was understood, indeed, that an act would be passed to make provision for the extinction of the traffic in contract labor by degrees, and it appeared at first that no more would be proposed than a gradual diminution in the number that might be annually imported. This, it soon became evident, would not satisfy the Labor party, which constitutes fully one-fifth of the voting power in the Representative Chamber, and the Cabinet brought in a bill absolutely prohibiting the further introduction of contract laborers.

The effect of the statute will be to compel the deportation of all the present contract laborers, whether Kanaka or Indian, immediately on the termination of their existing contracts, and to absolutely forbid the introduction of any others to take their places in the future. As might have been expected, the form which the act has taken has created very strong feeling and strenuous protest in Queensland. It is stated that its effect will be utterly to destroy the special industries in which the Queenslanders have been encouraged by their own Legislature to embark much capital, of which the sugar-cane industry is by far the most important; and feeling has run so high that threats of forcible



ble withdrawal from the new Federation have been made. It is alleged that under the law, if strictly interpreted, there would not remain an imported colored laborer in the state in three years' time, and that this would mean inevitable ruin to thousands in the country, as well as the total loss of much English capital embarked in the business. It is argued, on the other hand, that experience shows that colored labor is not essential to the sugar industry at any rate, as it has been prosperously carried on in the coastal districts of northeastern New South Wales for a good many years, where no colored labor has ever been introduced. But it is also asserted without compromise by the very great majority in the other five states of the Commonwealth that, even if need be at the cost of great financial loss, the contract labor traffic must cease, and must cease now.

There can be little question that Australia has done wisely in dealing with this question at once, as it was one that must have become only the more serious and difficult the longer it was delayed. The continued existence of any arrangement that cast a doubt upon the doctrine that Australia was to be essentially a country of free men, possessed of equal rights—which necessarily means of white men—must have sown the seeds of future trouble, more even than in any country less accessible to colored races, and offering fewer inducements for their employment. It may well be that justice may demand some special concession or compensation to the people of Queensland for the financial sacrifice they are called on to make for the sake of the Federation, but this can hardly be dealt with till it is ascertained that the industries cannot be successfully carried on by means of white labor. Should it be found that such is the case, it may be safely asserted that compensation in some form will be made to the people of Queensland by the people of the Commonwealth, who will consider any reasonable sacrifice cheap which rids the country of a serious danger. Should it prove, as has been confidently asserted, that European labor can be successfully used for such pursuits in tropical Australia, a most important fact will be ascertained which may well have a wider application and a more important bearing on the world's future than even that of securing for the continent of the South Pacific the unquestionable destiny of being, and remaining, a White Australia.

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